

Whitefish Transportation Plan Urban Corridor Study of US 93 CAC Meeting #1 Minutes (April 17, 2007)

Introduction

The first of four anticipated meetings of the Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) was held at the Whitefish Public Library conference room on Tuesday, April 17th began at 5:30 p.m. The CAC is an ad hoc committee for the Whitefish Transportation Plan and Urban Corridor Study of US 93 projects appointed by the Whitefish City Council during March 2007. The following people attended the meeting:

CAC Attendees

Sabine Brigitte	Citizen
Bridger Kelch	Whitefish Police Department
Mary Jo Look	Citizen
Shirley Jacobson	Whitefish City Council
Mary Person	Business Owner
George S. Gardner	Citizen
Don Spivey	Citizen
Fred Jones	Big Mountain Resort
Jerry House	Whitefish School District
Gary Stephens	Whitefish Business Owner/Heart of Whitefish

Agency/Consultant Team

Karin Hilding	City of Whitefish
Sheila Ludlow	MDT Statewide and Urban Planning Section (Helena)
Shane Stack	MDT Missoula District Office (Missoula)
Jeff Key	Robert Peccia & Associates (RPA - Helena)
Dan Norderud	Robert Peccia & Associates (RPA - Helena)

Others Present

Rick Cunningham	Whitefish Snow Bus
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Appointed CAC members Monte Gilman and Dale Duff were not present. Bridger Kelch attended the meeting in place of Mike Ferda and will do so for the remainder of the project. Mary Jo Look, Mary Person, and George Gardner are designated as alternate members of the CAC.

Meeting participants were provided with an agenda and other information to support and foster discussion during the meeting.

Meeting Purpose

The purposes of this initial meeting were to: 1) introduce Consultant Team and agency representatives to CAC members; 2) provide background on the community-wide Transportation Plan and Urban Corridor Study projects and project schedules; 3) establish and discuss the role of the CAC in the projects; 4) discuss known issues related to transportation in the community; and 5) solicit input on other issues or concerns relevant to transportation planning in the Whitefish area.

Meeting Summary

Jeff Key of Robert Peccia & Associates (RPA) began the meeting by asking those in attendance to introduce themselves and indicate what motivated their interest to participate in this transportation planning effort. Discussions at the meeting then focused on the following items:

Overview of Projects: Jeff Key, RPA's Project Manager, provided an overview of the Transportation Plan and Urban Corridor Study projects. Copies of slides from a PowerPoint presentation made to the Whitefish City Council on April 16 were provided to those in attendance. The slides presented background information about each project, summarized major work tasks and milestones for the projects, and outlined planned public outreach activities. Additionally, the slides identified the study area boundary for the Transportation Plan (the same area considered in the community's Growth Policy) and listed elements that will be emphasized in the plan.

Mr. Key noted that while several transportation studies have been completed for specific areas, no comprehensive Transportation Plan has ever been completed for the City of Whitefish and its surrounding area. He stressed that the Urban Corridor Study will be developed within the context of and concurrent with the Whitefish Transportation Plan. This approach allows for a focused look at US 93 through Whitefish based on the consideration of existing and planned land use changes and a detailed evaluation of community-wide transportation needs and desires. The corridor study will allow for a "fresh look" at issues associated with US Highway 93 through Whitefish and offers the opportunity to examine a full range of design options for the facility.

Mr. Key emphasized that these new planning efforts will be sensitive to prior community input and projects like: previous "subarea" transportation studies; the US Highway 93—Somers to Whitefish Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS); the Downtown Business District Master Plan; and the community's current Growth Policy Update project. He emphasized the value of previous efforts by the Citizens Working Group (CWG)—a group previously established to provide design input for the "Whitefish Urban" and "Whitefish-West" projects under development by the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT).

CAC Guiding Parameters: Mr. Key provided those attending with a handout discussing the CAC's anticipated role in the Whitefish projects. He explained the CAC will act as an advisory group with a much broader focus than the former CWG. While the CWG generally focused on two specific reconstruction projects on Highway 93, the CAC will be asked to help the Consultant Team identify community-wide transportation needs and issues. The CAC will be asked to serve as a

sounding board as recommendations to address identified needs and issues are developed.

Mr. Key then outlined the anticipated roles and responsibilities of the CAC and the Consultant Team. CAC members acknowledged the anticipated responsibilities. Several members of the CAC who previously served on the CWG group indicated that considerable time and effort was spent in 2005 on issues that will be relevant to these new projects. The Consultant Team acknowledged this past work and indicated copies of the minutes from past CWG meetings are available. Several CAC members expressed an interest in viewing these minutes, so it was agreed that copies of all previous CWG meetings and a public open house meeting held during April 2005 will be provided to all CAC members.

Gary Stephens requested that the Consultant Team provide relevant background materials to help CAC members during their review of project deliverables.

Review of Transportation Issues Theme Boards: Mr. Key expressed that the Consultant Team recognizes that significant community input and discussion about transportation issues and the Highway 93 corridor has already occurred in Whitefish. He stated that in preparation for the April 16 Public Open House and first CAC meeting, RPA reviewed public comments received during several important projects in the Whitefish area including:

- US Highway 93 - Somers to Whitefish FEIS (1994)
- Downtown Business District Master Plan (approved by the Whitefish City Council in early 2006)
- Whitefish Urban & West Projects (MDT and WGM Group)
 - Minutes from the Public Open House Meeting (April 2005)
 - Minutes from Whitefish Urban & West Highway 93 CWG meetings (2005)
- Whitefish Growth Policy Update (2006/2007)
 - Draft Elements of Growth Policy Update
 - Summaries of comments obtained through community visioning sessions
 - Summaries of community surveys

Mr. Key indicated the Consultant Team's intention was to acknowledge past work and build upon known transportation issues and concerns in the Whitefish area. As a starting point, RPA developed several transportation issues "theme" boards focusing on the following topics: Traffic Operations, Safety, Trucks, Pedestrian/Bicycle Facilities, Parking, Land Use/Growth, Aesthetics, and the Natural and Human Environments. Each board provided a broad issue statement for each topic and a list of specific conditions or concerns relating to the issue. The issues boards were made available to the CAC both as large display boards and as handouts.

The issue statements and associated conditions or concerns listed on each issue board were then reviewed and verified with CAC. Input was solicited from members about new or additional concerns related to each topic before moving on to successive issues boards.

Based on the review of the issues boards, the following new items were identified:

Traffic Operations

- The real issue in Whitefish is the lack of alternate north-south routes (like Wisconsin Avenue) serving Big Mountain and areas north of the railroad.
- Whitefish needs another parallel north-south route east of US Highway 93 with a railroad crossing.

Safety

- Pedestrian and bicyclist safety near schools in Whitefish is important.
- The center two-way left turn lane on Highway 93 at the south edge of Whitefish poses a safety concern. The design contributes to conflicts between opposing vehicles making left turns.
- The community hospital has moved to a new location and traffic patterns are changing. CAC members noted an emergency only access from Highway 93 to the hospital is being used for general access to the facility.

Trucks

- Truck traffic generated by construction activities in the Whitefish area is substantial and contributes to congestion within the community.
- Several truck bypass possibilities were mentioned.

Pedestrian/Bicycle Facilities

- No additional comments from CAC.

Parking

- No additional comments from CAC.

Land Use/Growth

- The CAC recommended revising the last bullet item to say: "General support for managing growth in the community."
- Neighborhoods (like the railroad district) in Whitefish are changing from traditional uses and zoning regulations allow for increases in densities. In some cases, single family dwellings are being replaced by duplexes or multi-family housing. The model developed to help forecast future traffic conditions needs to be sensitive to these types of land use changes.

Aesthetics

- No additional comments from CAC. It was learned that a Walgreen's drugstore is proposed for the Highway 93 South.

Don Spivey indicated that there has been lots of interest in the design/appearance of Highway 93 South over the years and mentioned that Doug Adams has been involved in an effort to reconsider the idea of installing a raised median on this section of roadway.

Fred Jones also commented that the current design of Highway 93 South does nothing for the appearance of the community. He stressed that changing the roadway's appearance is important and can help visitors recognize they have left the highway and entered the City.

Natural Environment

- No additional comments from CAC.

Dan Norderud provided a brief explanation of the term "PM-10 nonattainment area" and explained how the community received the designation.

Human Environment

- It was noted that efforts to clean up soil contamination at the former Big Mountain Tire site are underway.

Identification of Traffic Counting Locations: Mr. Key related that the scope of work for the project included doing traffic movement counts at 27 intersection locations within the study area. He provided a list of critical intersections for evaluation and asked the CAC for help in identifying additional traffic count locations. As a result, the following potential count locations were identified:

Signalized Intersections:

1. 2nd Street/Spokane Avenue
2. 2nd Street/Central Avenue
3. 2nd Street/Baker Avenue
4. Wisconsin Avenue/Edgewood Place
5. Spokane Avenue/13th Street Avenue
6. Spokane Avenue/18th Street
7. U.S. Highway 93/MT Highway 40

Unsignalized Intersections:

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| 8. U.S. Highway 93/Blanchard Lake Rd. | 18. Spokane Avenue/4th Street |
| 9. U.S. Highway 93/JP Road | 19. Spokane Avenue/5th Street |
| 10. U.S. Highway 93/Karrow Avenue | 20. Fir Avenue/2nd Street |
| 11. U.S. Highway 93/State Park Road | 21. Fir Avenue/4th Street |
| 12. Karrow Avenue/7th Street | 22. 2nd Street/Kalispell Avenue |
| 13. Baker Avenue/4th Street | 23. Pine Avenue/2nd Street |
| 14. Baker Avenue/5th Street | 24. Pine Avenue/4th Street |
| 15. Baker Avenue/7th Street | 25. Pine Avenue/7th Street |
| 16. Baker Avenue/13th Street | 26. Ashar Avenue/7th Street |
| 17. Spokane Avenue/1st Street | 27. Skyles Place/Wisconsin Avenue |

A map showing the potential count locations will be produced and forwarded to the City of Whitefish Public Works Director and Assistant City Engineer for review and approval.

Other Miscellaneous Discussion Items

Jerry House noted that there has been lots of time and effort spent on considering transportation in the community and volumes of information exist. Mr. Key acknowledged the comment and reiterated that the intent is to make use of and build upon existing information for the Transportation Plan and Corridor Study projects.

Don Spivey believes that it is very important to ensure the public is involved in the process. The group then generally discussed ways to engage the public in the development of the transportation plan including targeting specific groups (like parent groups at schools) to enhance “word of mouth” knowledge of the project and ensuring the project is publicized in local newspapers. It was agreed that Press Releases summarizing CAC meeting discussions will be written and provided to the Whitefish Pilot and Whitefish Free Press after each meeting.

Gary Stephens commented on his desire to see a transportation plan that was realistic and fundable. He noted many plans have been done within the community and seem to sit on the shelf.

Conclusion

Mr. Key concluded the meeting by summarizing what was accomplished and briefly outlining upcoming activities for the projects. Future meeting dates were generally discussed and it was determined that the next CAC meeting would be scheduled for early June. The group asked that no CAC meeting be scheduled for August.

The meeting concluded at 7:35 p.m.

Action Items for Consultant Team

1. Provide CAC members with copies of the following documents:
 - Minutes from the Public Open House Meeting for the Whitefish Urban & West projects
 - Minutes from Whitefish Urban & West Highway 93 CWG meetings
 - Downtown Business District Master Plan
 - Whitefish Pedestrian/Bicycle Plan
2. Write Press Release for April 17, 2007 CAC Meeting

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